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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 001112

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE; EUR/UMB

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PL](#) [UP](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: POLES FATALISTIC ABOUT UKRAINIAN ELECTIONS

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR DAN SAINZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)  
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Poland shares our desire to integrate Ukraine into Western institutions, but many in the GoP view the upcoming Ukrainian presidential election in zero-sum terms: a likely victory for Russia and loss for Poland -- no matter which candidate wins. Many Poles believe that for five years, the GoP backed the wrong horse -- Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko -- and will lose influence now that his political opponents are on the rise. Despite their current pessimism, Poles have built a network of regional contacts and aid programs that could continue to nudge Ukraine towards the West. END SUMMARY.

THE REALIZATION: EGGS IN ONE BASKET  
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¶2. (C) Polish officials and think tank experts argue that Poland will lose influence in Kyiv after the election, whereas Russia has courted all key Ukrainian presidential candidates except Yushchenko. They told us Poland had erred by pinning its hopes on Yushchenko following the 2004 Orange Revolution. Even as Yushchenko's popularity waned, Poland continued to ignore influential politicians like Russia-friendly opposition leader and former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich. Swept up in the excitement of the Orange Revolution, Poles overestimated Yushchenko's ability to consolidate power and lead Ukraine to the West. "We should have cultivated links to all key politicians, even if distasteful for us," lamented Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Senior Fellow at the Center for International Relations and former Chair of the Democratic Party (PD).

¶3. (C) To minimize damage from betting on the wrong horse, the GoP over the past year has belatedly opened channels with Yushchenko's rivals through visits and phone calls. Even President Lech Kaczynski -- Yushchenko's closest ally in Warsaw -- has reached out to the Ukrainian President's political opponents, achieving "mixed results," according to a presidential aide. Maciej Jakubik, an expert in Kaczynski's Foreign Affairs Office, told us that Kaczynski is "realistic" about Yushchenko's slim re-election chances. In addition, Kaczynski has voiced increasing disappointment to aides about Yushchenko's efforts to win the support of Ukrainian nationalists, sometimes at Poland's expense. Jakubik said the atmospherics of Yushchenko's September meeting with Kaczynski were friendly, but "slightly dampened" compared to previous visits.

TYMOSHENKO: BEST OF THE LOT?  
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¶4. (C) Most of our interlocutors agree that a victory by PM Yuliya Tymoshenko would be the best -- but far from perfect -- electoral outcome for Poland. Based on our conversations,

they see the scorecard as follows:

--TYMOSHENKO: Although Polish politicians, including PM Tusk, have tepid relations with Tymoshenko, they see her as pragmatic and willing to work with whomever offers the best deal. Many Poles believe her election victory could give Western countries a chance to lure Ukraine away from Russia, provided they offer enough financial aid and visa-free travel. But Poles fear that Russia's economic leverage will trump the West's. Polish analysts also believe that Tymoshenko will not resolve Polish-Ukrainian historical irritants, and will merely sweep them under the rug.

--YANUKOVYCH: Poles generally view a Yanukovych victory as the worst-case scenario for Poland. Not only would he align Kyiv more closely with Moscow and kill Ukraine's NATO bid, he would probably turn a cold shoulder to Warsaw because of Poland's support for Yushchenko during the Orange Revolution. In addition, they believe he would side with Russia in ongoing disputes with Poland over sensitive historical issues.

--YATSENYUK: Our contacts describe Yatsenyuk as either an enigma or a paper tiger. After traveling to Kyiv in June, FM Sikorski complained to his staff that Yatsenyuk was guarded and superficial, making it hard to discern his views on relations with Poland, Russia, and the EU. In addition, Yatsenyuk's use of Russian campaign managers has sparked concerns about Moscow's influence.

--YUSHCHENKO: Even if Yushchenko pulls off a miracle victory, Polish analysts believe he would remain weak and lurch

WARSAW 00001112 002 OF 002

towards nationalism to shore up his support base in Western Ukraine. Such a course would increase tensions with Poland over historical issues, worsen political divisions in Ukraine, and might even lead to Russian aggression against Ukraine.

ALL IS NOT LOST

15. (C) Although Poland seems destined to lose influence with the Presidential office in Kyiv, it can still draw Ukraine towards Western institutions through its voice in the EU, its aid programs, and its network of regional contacts.

-- EASTERN PARTNERSHIP (EPI). No matter who becomes President, the EPI offers Ukraine the prospect of more aid and freer travel to the EU. Poland, which co-sponsored the EUR 600 million EPI with Sweden, can help keep the sometimes reluctant EU engaged with Ukraine, especially after Warsaw becomes EU President in 2011. Polish officials are also impressed with the flexibility of U.S. aid programs in Ukraine compared to the EU's rigid criteria. They would likely be willing partners, along with the U.S., in urging the EU to adopt a more flexible and targeted approach in Ukraine, particularly in the context of the EPI.

-- LEVERAGING BILATERAL AID AND LOCAL CONTACTS. Poland can still influence Ukraine through bilateral aid and contacts with Ukrainian politicians, journalists and NGOs, many of whom regularly travel to Poland. Polish officials tell us they have focused efforts on boosting: independent judiciary and media, EU/NATO integration efforts, and economic management. While most of Poland's contacts are in western Ukraine, some NGOs tell us they are gradually making headway in the eastern part of the country. We should continue to encourage Poland to export its economic and democratic transformation experience to Ukraine.

-- FAMILY AND EMPLOYMENT TIES. Finally, many Poles maintain family and business relations with ethnic Ukrainians, especially near the border, and thousands of Ukrainians work in Poland, often illegally. While not subject to government

policy, this web of personal relationships, aided by a bilateral agreement to open small border-crossing points, will preserve Poland's influence in Ukraine for some time to come.

16. (U) This cable has been cleared with Embassy Kyiv.  
TULLEY